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Annual report on the evaluation function and major evaluations in UNICEF

Summary

This annual report has been prepared in accordance with the Evaluation Policy (E/ICEF/2008/4) and relevant Executive Board decisions. The report provides information on global developments in evaluation and the current state of the evaluation function in UNICEF, outlining progress in strengthening the decentralized evaluation function. A thematic analysis of programming on violence against children summarizes findings from a meta-evaluation of 52 country-level evaluations conducted between 2005 and 2010.

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Introduction

1. The evaluation function in UNICEF operates under .he Evaluation Policy approved by the Executive Board in 2008. It strengthens the organization's work by contributing to organizational transparency, learning and accountability. Evaluation helps UNICEF produce better results for children and women by providing the organization with timely, strategically focused and objective information on the performance of its policies, programmes and initiatives, while publication of evaluation reports promotes transparency. The UNICEF Evaluation Office provides leadership and support for the evaluation function throughout the organization. It also commissions independent evaluations and undertakes joint evaluation activities with agencies within the United Nations system and with other partners.

2. Steady and sustained progress has been made within the framework provided by the Evaluation Policy. However, the organizational context and the wider international setting have seen major changes in recent years, with further changes expected in 2012. UNICEF therefore proposes to undertake a thorough review of its evaluation function and the Evaluation Policy, with a view to updating the policy for submission to the Executive Board in mid-2013.

I. System-wide coherence in evaluation

Harmonization and simplification

3. In recent years, the strengthened focus on results in development cooperation has been matched by increased attention to evaluation methods, approaches and activities. The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) helps ensure coherence, in terms of common evaluation norms, standards and competences, across the United Nations system. UNICEF has provided substantial leadership and support in this area, and continued to engage effectively in 2011, not only at the headquarters level, but also through several regional initiatives and, at the country level, through United Nations country team monitoring and evaluation working groups.

4. UNICEF has led UNEG task forces or contributed modest funding and technical inputs to key areas of UNEG work. These include the following:

(a) Human rights and gender equality: finalizing and disseminating evaluation guidance, including a handbook for evaluators;

(b) Impact evaluation: development of guidance materials;

(c) United Nations Development Framework (UNDAF) evaluations: preparation and dissemination of guidance;

(d) National evaluation capacity development: adoption of a common approach for United Nations system collaboration, joint capacity-building activities and identification of good practices;

(e) UNEG evaluation practice exchange: sharing UNICEF guidance on equity-focused evaluation and on the decentralized evaluation function.

5. With UNICEF support, UNEG has contributed to evaluations of the Delivering as One approach, from evaluability assessments in 2008, through quality support for

country-led evaluations in 2009-2010, to participation through the UNEG chair in the management of the ongoing independent evaluation of Delivering as One.

6. UNEG has proved to be a useful vehicle for harmonizing evaluation practices across the United Nations system while maintaining alignment with international standards. It has supported complex evaluations addressing systemic issues and is now developing guidelines for evaluating the normative work of the United Nations. However, the evaluation capacity of United Nations agencies is mixed and UNICEF support through UNEG, in the form of task-force leadership, technical advice and selective funding will continue to be required.

Joint evaluation

7. Joint evaluations include interagency activities within the United Nations and other multi-partner initiatives. Major joint evaluation activities undertaken by UNICEF in 2011 include the Evaluation of the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative; and inputs to the design, management and funding of the 2012 Joint Evaluation of Joint Gender Programmes, initiated by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

8. A number of joint evaluation activities related to humanitarian action were undertaken: (a) Evaluation of the Central Emergency Response Fund, the largest single funding source for UNICEF emergency operations (led by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs); (b) Joint Global Logistics Cluster Evaluation (led by the World Food Programme), due to report in 2012; and (c) inter-agency real-time evaluations of the responses to the emergencies in Haiti and in the Horn of Africa.

9. As development cooperation becomes progressively country-led and organized around multi-stakeholder partnerships, joint evaluations become increasingly important. However, given the differing mandates and uneven levels of capacity among agencies, the coordination of such evaluations can be challenging. Further attention is needed to develop quick and efficient ways of working to deliver high-quality joint evaluations.

II. The evaluation function in UNICEF: performance and results

10. In 2011, a set of three key performance indicators was included in the annual report to provide a snapshot of UNICEF-wide performance on evaluation. This year, to provide greater detail, six indicators are presented in this report.

Indicator 1: Number of evaluations managed and submitted to the Global Evaluation Database

11. In 2010, UNICEF managed 140 evaluations and 700 studies and surveys (averaging 1 evaluation and 5 studies/surveys per office). This compares to annual totals, averaged across UNICEF, of 248 and 813 respectively in 2008-2009. The cause of the drop in numbers is not clear, but it may reflect a clearer categorization of evaluations, as well as an emphasis by the Evaluation Office and the regional offices on selection of strategic subjects for evaluation and on using the limited resources on fewer but better-quality evaluations.

12. The annual rate of submission of evaluation reports to the Global Evaluation Database continues to increase, from under 30 per cent in 2009 to 71 per cent in 2010 and 91 per cent in 2011. The database is an important tool for organizing the submission, archiving and quality assessment of reports. An evaluation dashboard has been developed for inclusion in the performance management module of VISION, to provide managers with a convenient management and oversight tool.

Indicator 2: Topical distribution

13. Evaluations conducted in 2010 and reviewed under the Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS)[1] were spread across the medium-term strategic plan focus areas as follows: 25 per cent examined child survival and development issues; 15 per cent examined education and gender; 10 per cent examined HIV/AIDS; 16 per cent examined child protection; 1 per cent examined policy advocacy and partnerships, and 33 per cent examined cross-cutting themes and organizational performance. This shows coverage across all areas of strategic focus.

Indicator 3: Types of evaluations conducted

14. Evaluations assess effectiveness of results at various levels. The highest level of programme results measured in evaluations conducted in 2010 was as follows: impact (33 per cent), outcome (26 per cent) and output (33 per cent). UNICEF would expect future reports to show a reduction in output-focused evaluations in favour of higher-level results.

15. The number of evaluations co-managed with other United Nations agencies increased from 1 per cent in 2009 to 6 per cent in 2010. Also in 2010, 26 per cent were jointly managed with non-United Nations organizations (versus 17 per cent in 2009); a further 6 per cent were country-led; 43 per cent were led by UNICEF; and management arrangements were not clearly reported for 19 per cent of evaluations.

Indicator 4: Quality of UNICEF evaluations

16. In 2011, the external reviewers of GEROS quality-reviewed 89 evaluations conducted the previous year by UNICEF offices at all levels. Overall, they rated 40 per cent of the 2010 reports as satisfactory according to UNICEF evaluation standards (versus 36 per cent in 2009) and a further 30 per cent to be nearly satisfactory but with some more work required. However, 30 per cent were rated as poor quality; this is double the figure for evaluations completed in 2009 (15 per cent). Although considered a one-year anomaly, the issue will be monitored, with further analysis undertaken by the Evaluation Office.

Indicator 5: Use of evaluation, including management responses

17. The Evaluation Policy requires that a management response should be completed for each evaluation. Advocacy and oversight has resulted in improved compliance in the preparation of management responses and in uploading completed responses to the tracking system. Upload rates increased from 12 per cent in 2009 to 47 per cent in 2010 and 65 per cent in 2011 (for evaluation reports completed the previous year). To improve compliance further, appropriate performance indicators

[1] The 2011 GEROS report of the external reviews that generated the data for indicators 2-4 is found at http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_60935.html.

have been included in the evaluation dashboard in VISION; the relevant guidance is being revised to take account of recent experience with the system; and an e-learning module is under preparation.

Indicator 6: Corporate-level evaluations

18. Corporate-level evaluations, managed by the Evaluation Office, are included in the Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (IMEF). The 2010-2011 IMEF presented commitments to conduct 15 corporate-level evaluations. By April 2012, 10 were completed (67 per cent); 3 were under implementation (20 per cent); and 2 (13 per cent) were cancelled (due to data and funding shortfalls). A summary of the IMEF evaluation results is available on the evaluation web pages of the UNICEF website (www.unicef.org/evaluation), along with the completed evaluations.

19. In 2011, the first-ever global evaluation on UNICEF work in early childhood development was completed, setting out recommendations for mainstreaming the approach. The past year also saw the completion of research studies on the role of education in peacebuilding, identifying key lessons and recommendations for UNICEF and the broader United Nations community and informing a major new education and peacebuilding programme. Progress was made on evaluations on life skills, nutrition and the human rights-based approach to UNICEF programming. On institutional topics, a synthesis report was prepared, summarizing experience from several country-level programme performance assessments undertaken in previous years; and lessons from the UNICEF Asia-Pacific Shared Services Centre (APSSC) were reviewed and documented. An evaluation was jointly managed by UNICEF and the Government of the Netherlands on the impact of the Mozambique programme to expand by one million the number of people with access to safe water and safe sanitation. This is one of a global set of evaluations in an area where, so far, few high-quality impact evaluations have been conducted.

20. UNICEF operations in humanitarian emergencies were also addressed, notably through an independent review of the organization's operational response to the Haiti earthquake of January 2010. This substantial assessment contributed to the formulation of a Corporate Emergency Activation Procedure and associated simplified standard operating procedures for major emergencies.[2]

21. Following wide consultation within UNICEF, the IMEF has been revised for the 2012-2013 biennium. The 2012-2013 IMEF has been made available to the Executive Board and is posted on the evaluation pages of the UNICEF website.

III. The evaluation function in UNICEF: human and financial resources

22. Information on the human and financial resources available for evaluation is presented every two years to the Executive Board. This allows tracking of intended shifts over a biennium and presentation of trends over time rather than reporting on more volatile annual fluctuations.

[2] Joint evaluations of humanitarian activities were already mentioned in paragraph 9.

Human resources

23. As of December 2011, professional posts of all levels that included "evaluation" in the job title existed in 95 country offices, compared to 89 in 2010 and 85 in 2008. In addition, such posts existed in all seven regional offices and in two headquarters locations. Table 1 indicates changes between March 2008 and December 2011 in the number of evaluation professionals at level-3 posts and higher.[3]

Table 1
Growth in number of UNICEF evaluation professionals, 2008-2011

	3/2008	3/2010	12/2011	Growth 2010-2011
International evaluation professionals*	50	66	73	*+11%*
National evaluation professionals**	40	37	41	*+11%*
Evaluation professionals (total)	**90**	**103**	**114**	***+11%***
Percentage of evaluation professionals in field offices	*84%*	*84%*	*89%*	*+6%*
Percentage female evaluation professionals	*42%*	*50%*	*44%*	*-12%*

Source: Division of Human Resources data, various years.
* Level P-3 and above
** Level NOC and above.

24. Most changes since 2010 have been positive. An increase of 11 per cent in higher-level posts is helping UNICEF to meet its corporate commitment to increase the skills dedicated to evaluation. The fact that additional positions have been created in the international professional category is creating more opportunities for career development. However, the entire growth of the evaluation cadre was met by male candidates; this has meant a slippage from the desired 50/50 ratio that was met in 2010.

25. The number of offices with posts at level 3 or higher increased in 2010 from 53 to 61. The number of such posts is a measure of the organization's commitment to obtaining high-quality evidence from evaluation. Nonetheless, the majority of UNICEF country offices do not have an evaluation staff member at level 3 or higher. They therefore lack the technical support required for high-quality evaluation. In many offices, monitoring and evaluation is covered by sector specialists who serve as monitoring and evaluation "focal points".

26. For the first time, UNICEF is able to report the amount of time and effort that is put into evaluation by key staff. As table 2 shows, over 90 per cent of the staff members with evaluation responsibilities perform a second function, and 28 per cent perform a third job function.

27. The combination of monitoring and evaluation joins logically related functions. The addition of planning, and more remote responsibilities like social policy, attempts to blend different skill sets and certainly reduces the time available for

[3] Level 3 is the desired minimum level to ensure systemic competence.

monitoring and evaluation. While such combinations are understandable, given office staffing constraints, they are not ideal.

Table 2
Professional job-function combinations involving evaluation, 2011

Number of functions in job title	Combinations observed at level 3 or higher	Total number	Percentage
1	Evaluation	10	*9%*
2	Monitoring and Evaluation Planning and Evaluation Research and Evaluation	72	*63%*
3	Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Social Policy, Monitoring and Evaluation	32	*28%*

Source: Division of Human Resources data, 2012.

28. Important related evidence was provided by a 2011 survey of the performance of field-level staff members with monitoring and evaluation responsibilities (hereafter referred to as the DMEF Survey). Leaders of the Monitoring and Evaluation function in each office answered many questions about their work. When asked to calculate how their time is apportioned, evaluation received the lowest percentage, as shown in table 3. There were no major variations by region, office size or job title.

Table 3
Percentage of time monitoring and evaluation staff allocate to monitoring and evaluation functions in 2011

Category title	Range of tasks (selection)	Percentage of time allocated	Staff satisfaction with availability of human resources
Situation monitoring	Country programme documents; UNDAF; Programme indicators	*29%*	*75%*
Planning and performance monitoring	Sector monitoring; statistics systems; household surveys	*24%*	*77%*
Research	Studies; research; situation analysis	*17%*	*75%*
Other	Support to senior staff; donor reports; financial monitoring	*16%*	*N/A*
Evaluation	Designing terms of reference; supervising consultants; evaluation reports; management response	*14%*	*70%*

Source: UNICEF Decentralized Monitoring and Evaluation Function (DMEF) Survey Report, 2011, pp. 19-22.

29. While the majority of staff expressed satisfaction with the availability of human resources, a significant minority communicated dissatisfaction, especially on evaluation tasks, indicating a sense of overstretch.

Financial resources

30. Since 2006, annual reports on the evaluation function have included data on spending on evaluation that was based on coding assigned to transactions by managers. The coding guidance was consistent through 2010 but was significantly changed in 2011. The result of the change was to allow offices to code a broader set of activities under "Evaluation", with the result that 2011 data is not comparable with earlier years. For this report, the 2010 figures will be used to show comparable data with earlier years.

Table 4
Spending trends for evaluation, country and regional offices, 2006-2010

	(In thousands of United States dollars)			
Item	**2006**	**2009**	**2010**	**Trend 2009-2010**
Spending on evaluation	7 970	9 560	11 122	***+16%***
Comparator: overall UNICEF programme spending	2 120 000	2 940 000	3 354 000	***+14%***
Evaluation spending as a percentage of all programme spending	*0.38%*	*0.33%*	*0.33%*	***No change***
Related spending: analysis, research and studies	27 900	46 310	47 715	***+3%***
Related spending: data, databases, surveys and statistics	24 700	35 230	40 060	***+14%***
Overall research/social data/evaluation as a percentage of all programme spending	*2.84%*	*3.10%*	*2.95%*	***-0.5%***

Source: Calculated from data provided by the Division of Finance and Administrative Management, 2011.

31. The trends set out in table 4 are consistent with previous years. At 0.33 per cent, evaluation spending is far below one per cent of programme spending.[4] Evaluation spending is growing as the overall programme budget grows, but the trend is flat.

32. In terms of funding types or sources, the pattern of evaluation funding at the field office level has traditionally mirrored the pattern of overall UNICEF funding (see table 5).

[4] A recent review of the evaluation function within the United Nations, commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Secretary-General, notes: "While there is no official standard for the budget ratio, a widely used guide is to spend 1 per cent of the total budget on evaluation … . Most evaluation units' expenditure in the United Nations system is less than 1 per cent." *Independent System Wide Evaluation Mechanisms: Comprehensive Review of the Existing Institutional Framework for System Wide Evaluation of Operational Activities for Development of the United Systems Mandated in General Assembly Resolution 64/289 — Draft Report* by Angela Bester and Charles Lusthaus (January 2012), page 38.

Table 5
Funding sources for evaluation, country and regional offices, 2006-2010

Funding source	*(In thousands of United States dollars)*					
	Spending by source, annual average			Percentage by source		
	2006-2007	2008-2009	2010	2006-2007	2008-2009	2010
Regular resources	3 500	3 350	4 810	*39%*	*36%*	*43%*
Other resources — regular	3 950	4 800	5 360	*44%*	*51%*	*48%*
Other resources — emergency	1 600	1 200	950	*18%*	*13%*	*9%*
Total evaluation resources	9 050	9 350	11 120	*100%*	*100%*	*100%*

Source: Division of Finance and Administrative Management, various years.

33. As already indicated, the management data from 2011 is not comparable with earlier years. The inclusion of a broader range of activities in the category covering evaluation resulted in a spending level of $30.1 million, or about 3 times the recent averages.[5] Changes resulting from the implementation of VISION may cause further adjustments. Arriving at a new baseline and stable data will take some time. UNICEF expects to provide more definitive information in the 2014 report.

34. Concerning the Evaluation Office alone, spending during 2010-2011 increased slightly, compared to 2008-2009 (see table 6). Major external funding partners in the biennium were the Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland. For 2012-2013, there will be no growth in regular resources for the Evaluation Office. The difficult resource mobilization environment is demonstrated by the decline in other resources on hand, currently at $1.76 million versus $3.2 million at the start of the 2010-2011 biennium. Internally, the Evaluation Committee is monitoring resource allocations for evaluation.

[5] This breaks down by funding source as follows: regular resources 34.7 per cent; other resources–regular 52.9 per cent; and other resources–emergency 12.3 per cent.

Table 6
Evaluation Office: available funding

	(In thousands of United States dollars)			
	2010[a]	**2011[a]**	**2012**	**2013**
Support budget	2 183	2 175	2 023[b]	2 150[b]
Regular resources	787	1 383	1 100[b]	1 100[b]
Other resources — regular	818	1 075	827[c]	
Other resources — emergency	1 209	603	937[c]	

Source: Division of Finance and Administrative Management, various years.
[a] Expenditures.
[b] Allocations.
[c] On hand.
Note: Figures for 2011 are provisional.

IV. Strengthening evaluation in the field

General overview

35. The DMEF survey found that the decentralized evaluation function is performing relatively well and in compliance with the UNICEF Evaluation Policy. The survey found that the decentralized structure provides a framework upon which UNICEF offices at country, regional and headquarters levels can rely to support organizational learning, improved performance, strategic decision-making, reporting on results, and evidence-based policy advocacy. The survey also concluded that UNICEF has made significant efforts to support national monitoring and evaluation systems. However, the survey also noted areas of concern that require attention to achieve consistent quality of the decentralized evaluation function. Specific strengths and weaknesses are discussed next.

Governance and leadership

36. The survey found that the governance of the decentralized evaluation function has strengths but also areas for further improvement. Strongest compliance was seen against the following benchmarks:

(a) Monitoring and evaluation staff provides assistance in the development of terms of reference (98 per cent of country offices);

(b) Monitoring and evaluation staff provides assistance in the selection of evaluation teams (91 per cent);

(c) Senior management approves terms of reference (88 per cent); and

(d) Senior management approves the selection of evaluation teams (89 per cent).

Two areas need improvement:

(a) Involvement of regional offices in quality review of draft evaluation reports (86 per cent); and

(b) In country offices, senior management oversight of preparation of management responses (76 per cent).

37. To facilitate the oversight of the decentralized evaluation function, the Evaluation Office developed a dashboard showing the progress of each region against key performance indicators, drawn from various internal databases. This dashboard will be integrated into the performance management module of VISION in 2012. The Middle East and North Africa Regional Office (MENARO) has activated a similar dashboard to facilitate country-level oversight.

38. Regional evaluation committees composed of country representatives and senior staff of regional offices advised on regional evaluation priorities, as well as on improving adherence to the evaluation policy. This encouraged country offices to develop strategies that align the governance of the evaluation function with the norms of the Evaluation Policy (Central African Republic and Niger), make evaluation a formal priority in their annual management plans (Uzbekistan) and develop workflow tracking systems (Eritrea).

Enhancing strategic planning of evaluations

39. UNICEF continues to use the Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (IMEP) as a decision-making tool to support strategic planning of evaluation activities at the country level. Some 86 per cent of UNICEF offices indicated that IMEPs are discussed in meetings led by senior management; 55 per cent reported that Governments and partners, including other United Nations agencies, are involved in the IMEP planning phase. Ethiopia and Tanzania aligned the planning and implementation of their monitoring and evaluation plans to the governmental planning calendar. Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, severely affected by the Horn of Africa emergency, developed emergency-IMEPs with the support of the Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa (ESARO).

40. Under the leadership of the Regional Management Team, the Americas and the Caribbean Regional Office (TACRO) conducted a regional analysis of country IMEPs to identify thematic areas in which several countries were planning evaluations, with the aim of creating synergies and coordination to collect evidence on what works in regional priorities for children. The regional offices in East Asia and the Pacific, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and West and Central Africa (WCAR) prepared plans for regional thematic evaluations. The Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) region stabilized financial planning by dedicating 5 per cent of thematic funding to evaluation.

Promoting and supporting quality evaluations

41. External reviewers assessed the quality of all the evaluation reports submitted by April 2011 (these reports concerned evaluations conducted in 2010).[6] A global analysis was produced, and findings and follow-up actions discussed with regional

[6] See paras. 22-23 of the 2011 Board report on evaluation for a description of the GEROS system.

and country offices. Individual feedback reports were sent to UNICEF offices, with practical recommendations on how to improve the quality of future evaluations. The 35 best evaluations have been highlighted and shared with all relevant programme divisions.

42. Regional offices invested considerable efforts to improve the quality of evaluation managed by country offices, notably through quality-assurance systems that review monitoring and evaluation plans, terms of reference and evaluation reports. However, not all country offices take full advantage of this regional support. To address this challenge, the regional offices in MENA and CEE/CIS made the regional quality-assurance system compulsory for every evaluation in 2011. The regional monitoring and evaluation officers are increasingly invited to join steering committees for strategic evaluation at country level. WCARO invested significant efforts in ensuring country programmes are evaluable: Benin, Cameroon, Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Niger and the Republic of Congo carried out evaluability assessments. At the inter-agency level, TACRO revitalized a regional United Nations task force on evaluation-capacity development.

Enhancing evaluation usage and management responses

43. The Evaluation Office and the regional offices reinforced advocacy and technical support on the preparation and submission of management responses. The APSSC documented and disseminated good practices and MENA developed guidance on overcoming bottlenecks.

44. The DMEF survey reported generally good practices in the utilization of evaluations, studies and surveys, in particular in using findings for (a) reporting on results (92 per cent of country offices); (b) organizational learning (84 per cent); and (c) evidence-based policy advocacy (82 per cent). The survey found that additional efforts are needed in communicating findings, including by developing communication materials (73 per cent).

Strengthening internal evaluation capacity

45. Significant efforts continue to be undertaken to improve internal evaluation capacity at all levels. These include knowledge management activities, such as web-enabled communities of practice and web seminars ("webinars"), a help desk function, and e-bulletins and newsletters, as well as conventional network meetings, study visits and training seminars. Regional offices manage regionally specific efforts to augment global initiatives, such as the MENA and APSSC evaluation newsletters. The DMEF survey showed that monitoring and evaluation staff members are generally confident of their skills in managing evaluations. They are, however, less confident in managing evaluations of peacebuilding or humanitarian situations.

46. The survey indicated that, although UNICEF monitoring and evaluation staff members make good use of the knowledge management mechanisms, systematic training on monitoring and evaluation has not yet been fully institutionalized. To address this bottleneck, the Evaluation Office, in partnership with the Division of Human Resources and the regional offices, is developing an online self-learning induction programme, covering the governance of the evaluation function at country level and providing core skills to manage and use evaluations, with a particular focus on humanitarian settings.

47. The Evaluation Office is leading efforts to better equip UNICEF offices and partners in evaluating pro-equity interventions. A manual on designing and managing equity-focused evaluations was developed and disseminated with accompanying training; an electronic resource centre was created in partnership with UN-Women; and a webinar series was delivered in partnership with several organizations.

48. Significantly, the DMEF survey showed that many monitoring and evaluation officers are relatively short-term incumbents: 20 per cent have less than 2 years of monitoring and evaluation experience within UNICEF; 49 per cent have 2-5 years' experience; and 31 per cent have more than 5 years. The least experienced staff members were located in small offices and in middle-income country offices. These figures indicate problems in retaining monitoring and evaluation staff within the professional area.

V. National evaluation capacity development

UNEG and national evaluation capacities

49. In 2011, UNEG endorsed the concept paper on roles for UNEG members in national evaluation-capacity development drafted by a task force co-led by UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme, now co-chaired by UNICEF and the International Labour Organization (ILO). The objectives include facilitation of knowledge sharing, strengthening the quality of country-led evaluations, and support for global and regional evaluation associations.

Global learning

50. In partnership with several organizations, UNICEF consolidated its position as a knowledge centre on country-led monitoring and evaluation systems by expanding and updating an interactive Web 2.0 platform: *MyM&E*. This public inter-agency website (www.mymande.org) facilitates worldwide sharing of knowledge on country-led monitoring and evaluation systems. In 2011, membership grew to 2,839; since 2010, the number of visitors doubled, to 42,700 from over 45 countries; and page downloads increased by 50 per cent in one year to 111,000.

51. In partnership with UN-Women and UNEG, an electronic evaluation resource centre on equity, human rights and gender equality was launched, providing free and convenient access to state-of-the art approaches and methods to evaluators all over the world.

52. A new series of live webinars on equity-focused evaluations was arranged as an integral part of the *MyM&E* website. Seven webinars were organized in 2011, featuring keynote speakers of international standing, attracting more than 1,000 participants from around the world. The series was launched in partnership with UNEG, UNDP, ILO, UN-Women, Claremont University and the Rockefeller Foundation, as well as global professional evaluation associations.

Strengthening country-led monitoring and evaluation systems

53. In addition to supporting public-sector evaluation capacities, UNICEF is increasingly collaborating with national centres of excellence in evaluation, such as universities and research centres. TACRO facilitated the mapping of centres of excellence in Latin America and the Caribbean region, and UNICEF country offices are now engaging with the centres to support strategic evaluations. In Senegal, UNICEF is supporting the African Centre for Higher Studies in Management, identified by the World Bank as the regional institutional centre for learning on evaluation and results for francophone Africa, to improve its capacities as a training institution. In Zimbabwe, UNICEF was instrumental in establishing the Collaborating Centre for Operational Research and Evaluation to generate high-quality evidence for programming.

54. With support from UNICEF, the Morocco Evaluation Association (MEA) became a member of the committee revising the national constitution. Under the new constitution, the Government recognizes the obligation to evaluate public policies and programmes. UNICEF is now supporting MEA in advocating and supporting the establishment of a national evaluation system to evaluate public policies, including the allocation of an appropriate budget. Similarly, in Ghana, UNICEF supported the National Development Planning Commission to conduct a baseline assessment on the resources allocated and spent to support monitoring and evaluation systems. The assessment resulted in the Ministry of Finance instructing all ministries to allocate adequate resources to monitoring and evaluation systems. In Kyrgyzstan, UNICEF supported the establishment and operationalization of monitoring and evaluation units in the Ministry of Health and Education and in the Prime Minister's Office.

VI. Summary: addressing evaluation challenges in UNICEF

55. The preceding sections have described various aspects of UNICEF's evaluation system. This section recaps key evaluation challenges and summarizes action under way to address these and strengthen the effective use of evaluation results by UNICEF.

56. UNICEF's evaluation policy has provided a sound framework for the evaluation function across the organization. Steady progress has been made in implementing the policy. An effective oversight system has been established to monitor and support management of the function. Further, in 2012, selected key performance indicators will be included in the VISION system, facilitating closer management attention to compliance and performance.

57. Improved oversight has already helped UNICEF to meet key policy commitments. For example, the compliance rate for submission of evaluation reports to the central evaluation database is now over 90 per cent. However, better management information has also highlighted areas where further improvement is needed, notably in evaluation quality. Key determinants here are the quality of evaluation terms of reference; management and oversight by M&E staff with adequate skills and knowledge; quality of consultants; adequate budget provision; and sustained management attention, from the strategic choice of topics for evaluation through to ensuring a meaningful management response and follow up.

58. The DMEF survey indicates that country offices are now giving close attention to the preparation of terms of reference and selection of evaluation teams, while greater effort is required on management responses. Although the rate of compliance with this requirement has tripled in the past three years, a formal management response was prepared for only two thirds of evaluations completed in 2010 (as reported in 2011). The Evaluation Office is currently updating the guidance on management responses and will ensure wide dissemination, while Regional Offices will oversee field implementation.

59. Although the DMEF survey indicated good practices in utilizing evaluation material, there is scope to make greater efforts. The Evaluation Office is beginning to work with regional M&E staff to increase the range of communication materials and channels with the aim of improving the uptake and use of evaluation evidence.

60. Building staff skills and knowledge is supported through a new e-learning programme, a series of popular webinars, and regular e-bulletins, as well as through the *MyM&E* web platform, the online evaluation community of practice and the Evaluation Office helpdesk.

61. Finally, in 2012, a comprehensive review of the evaluation function will detect constraints and identify opportunities for further improvement and refinement of the system, while providing a sound basis for updating the evaluation policy to keep pace with UNICEF's changing needs.

VII. Thematic analysis: evaluation and the prevention of violence against children

Introduction

62. In 2011, a thematic analysis section was included in the annual report to inform the Board about UNICEF evaluations in a major area of programming. A thematic analysis can show (a) the evaluative evidence based on a synthesis of findings; and (b) how UNICEF is developing knowledge and data in the theme, including gaps that need addressing.

63. The theme for the 2012 report is the prevention of violence against children. "Violence" is a broad issue with overlapping features as defined by Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and related articles. Accordingly, this analysis is not limited to direct physical violence but also covers child protection issues where children are exposed to harm, including various forms of exploitation.

64. A key result area in child protection is improved "monitoring, research, evaluation and use of data". Preventing violence against children was selected as the theme for this report because it is a challenging programme area and because all partners recognize the importance of strengthening the indicators, tools and methodologies available to generate evidence.

Information base

65. Evaluations completed in years 2005-2010 and stakeholder consultations form the information base for this report. Recently, UNICEF conducted a meta-evaluation

entitled *Protecting Children from Violence: A Synthesis of Evaluation Findings*,[7] which reviewed evaluations commissioned mainly by field offices (only one global evaluation was available). Thematically, three or more evaluations were found covering the following areas: harmful traditional practices; children in residential care; recovery and transition from armed conflict; mine action; natural disasters; child labour; child trafficking and child migration; child abuse and exploitation; children living on the street; and violence in schools. A global evaluation of Child Protection in Emergencies, planned for 2012, will supply the emergency dimension, which is underrepresented in the sample.

66. The quality review of the evaluations arrived at the ratings in table 7.

Table 7
Quality ranking of 52 child protection evaluations, 2005-2010

Overall rating	%
Poor	27
Satisfactory	48
Very good	23
Excellent	2
Total	100

Source: External reviewers employing UNICEF standards.

67. The range of rankings shows poorer ratings than the UNICEF average for the years studied. Shortcomings in evaluation quality are linked to deficiencies in programme design: attempts to measure effectiveness were in some cases hampered by weaknesses in the programme results frameworks (poor indicators) and by weak arrangements for monitoring and evaluation (simplistic designs, unmeasured baselines, inadequate data from weak information management systems, confusion over roles and ineffective capacity-strengthening efforts). More attention is needed to address cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Evaluations require consistent support from UNICEF offices, avoiding midstream shifts in the scope of work.

68. There were also broad strengths. Evaluations focused on core evaluation criteria of relevance and appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. Some also looked at equity. The methodologies used were diverse and generally appropriate; in some instances, these included quantitative surveys employing control groups to allow assessment of impact and causality. In Zimbabwe, for example, an analysis of child protection systems surveyed 1,300 children and adults across programme and control areas. In post-emergency contexts, which are challenging but better funded, evaluations ranked better in quality than the average.

Findings and lessons on effective programming

69. This analysis focuses on four thematic areas:

(a) Attaining high levels of programme relevance and effectiveness;

(b) Developing comprehensive child protection systems;

[7] Available at www.unicef.org/evaluation.

(c) Adapting to specific social contexts;

(d) Child safeguarding.

70. This follows from their central significance in programming strategy on violence against children, and the availability of adequate evidence.

(a) Relevance and overall effectiveness

71. Among the 52 reports reviewed, 43 explicitly discussed the relevance of the programme, of which 23 (53 per cent) were assessed as completely relevant to their setting, 19 as partly relevant and 1 as not relevant. Diminished relevance most frequently occurred when programme objectives and interventions were not in alignment with national priorities, legal policy frameworks or international obligations.

72. Regarding overall programme effectiveness, 13 per cent were assessed as not effective, 67 per cent as partly effective and 19 per cent as largely or completely effective.

73. While acknowledging that improvements should be sought in relevance and effectiveness, the results are seen to be in line with expectations:

(a) UNICEF and partners must work within existing systems, even when these limit effectiveness. Whether the programmes become more effective over time is the key issue. For example, social welfare programmes faced structural challenges, such as weak referral mechanisms, poor service provision, shortages of skilled community development workers, safety threats and budgetary constraints.

(b) Programming to prevent violence against children has a limited validated evidence base. Therefore, the sector is continually innovating, and innovation carries the likelihood of mixed success. Of key importance is what was learned in these cases and how programming was adjusted.

(c) With few established strategies, existing national priorities and frameworks for measuring relevance may be underdeveloped. Targeting rights-based results useful in advocating for policy shifts is a sound measure of relevance, against which the programming performs well.

(b) Child protection systems

74. Child protection programmes often emphasize the building of child protection systems. These include as key components laws, policies and standards; service delivery mechanisms; human resources; coordination and collaboration among partners; communication and advocacy; and monitoring and evaluation to feed back to decision makers.

75. An effective systems approach was seen in many cases of programmes addressing violence against children. Good practices are seen in the 9 evaluations that examined strengthening the justice sector:

(a) Establishing law enforcement and justice structures led to more efficient management and follow-up of children's cases and, crucially, greater budgetary allocations;

(b) Developing regional structures increased arrests and convictions of traffickers and exploiters;

(c) Creating structures close to the community empowered these communities to advocate for justice, question harmful social norms and stand up against perpetrators of harmful practices;

(d) Developing case management and child-friendly procedures improved protection for victims, witnesses and offenders, including diverting many child offenders from prison;

(e) Directing attention across the pre-trial, trial and post-trial phases ensured continuity of care.

76. The value of the systems approach was established beyond doubt in the evaluations. However, in many cases, evaluators noted one or more problems related to the design of the systems or in implementation. They identified the following strategies as effective remedies:

(a) Securing political commitment behind the system, including identifying vulnerable and marginalized children; defining a minimum package of services; lobbying for their inclusion in legal frameworks and policies; undertaking cost analyses; and advocating for adequate budgets;

(b) Integrating child protection concerns across sectors such as education and health. This addresses common causes of vulnerability and increases the number of actors throughout the life cycle. Integrated multisectoral programmes were found to be more successful. However, there is still a rationale for well-constructed narrower interventions when cross-sectoral approaches are not possible;

(c) Planning across the "continuum of care", comprising prevention, early intervention, interim care and restoration. A tendency was noted to neglect prevention and early intervention in relation to immediate assistance/interim support, as with child trafficking programmes;

(d) Combining longer-term social change strategies with short-term tangible "entry points" that fulfil pressing needs of communities. For example, child injury prevention programmes should combine awareness-raising with environmental modifications (fences around ponds; road lighting) rather than awareness-raising alone;

(e) Encouraging private-sector collaboration with public, civil society and community actors. Engagement with individual firms often addressed the revision of labour practices or support for social protection programmes through training and apprenticeships, but rarely as part of a larger social mobilization strategy;

(f) Conducting due diligence and proper oversight when developing partnerships, especially when involving weak or new organizations. Where this was done poorly, evaluators questioned the absence of institutional assessments and the delegation of roles and responsibilities;

(g) Executing careful exit strategies following periods of deep engagement by UNICEF. Exit strategies were often not developed from the outset, had no financial sustainability plan and were neither communicated well nor managed smoothly.

(c) Context

77. Whether developing comprehensive systems or implementing more narrowly targeted programmes, initiatives targeting violence against children must be sensitive to the social context. While some community norms and practices are supportive of ending violence against children, others can be harmful.

78. Certain aspects of programmes on violence against children showed great sensitivity to context. Studies of beliefs and social organization that fostered or combated violence helped to define links to underlying structural issues such as poverty. Child participation showed strong results when it was seen by the community as encouraging positive maturation. Well-managed participation fostered increased knowledge and skills among children, and a reduction in violence in schools.

79. Nonetheless, evaluators noticed multiple instances of incomplete adaptation that threatened programme success. These included the following:

(a) "Recycling" interventions and concepts from other contexts and imposing them on communities, rather than rooting them in local practices and existing programmes. For example, many community members resisted rights-based messages because of the irrelevance of the messages to the local context and lack of participatory engagement.

(b) Failing to strengthen family and parental support. Some programmes provided information or skills training to children without regard to this interpersonal context.

(c) Underestimating the opportunities for child participation. There was a tendency to allow children to direct programmes in an unrealistic manner or to override children's opinions on the assumption that they are unaware of their best interests. Many participation activities were designed for stand-alone groups rather than as part of community structures. Participation of marginalized children, including those with disabilities or from outlying or migrant communities, was minimal.

(d) Misaligning gender roles. While gender-equity strategies featured in many programmes, execution was frequently poor. Common problems included failure to conduct in-depth gender analysis in the design phase, a lack of gender-disaggregated data, failing to remove barriers to girl's participation, including domestic chores and social pressure to marry, and inattentiveness to the definition of masculinity and boys' issues when inclusion would have helped them and the girls.

(d) Child safeguarding

80. UNICEF recognizes that in supporting partners addressing violence against children, the organizations and persons involved should be highly attuned to safeguarding children, since the programmes deal with confidentiality, exposure to risk and sensitive family practices, among other concerns. Few evaluations explicitly noted child safeguarding practices, but those that did had important findings. Good practices were observed in the development of child safeguarding policies comprising codes of conduct, child protection competency training, designating child safeguarding focal points and establishing referral protocols and

"whistle blowing" policies. Some programmes extended the policies to cover visitors and journalists (Lao PDR) or researchers and evaluators (Colombia).

81. When partners did not have child safeguarding policies in place or where these were poorly executed, a range of ethical problems were observed, including failure to respect the child's voice in determining how he or she is treated; failure to preserve the dignity of the child; creating unmet expectations; and, most importantly, inadvertently placing children in harm's way. Examples of practices putting children at risk included returning children to abusive environments without follow-up monitoring; asking children to identify peers at risk for committing crimes; asking children to report violence to adults who then did not act; situating training facilities where children had to walk long distances in unsafe settings; and breaches of confidentiality. There were also occasional instances where adult implementers were exposed to risks.

82. It is beyond the scope of this review to examine how these issues arose. That they feature in several evaluations raises questions about the adequacy of child safeguarding policies and systems in settings where UNICEF provides assistance. Reviewing these issues is the subject of a recommendation, presented below.

Monitoring and methodological development initiatives

83. Successful programming on violence against children integrates monitoring data and research findings with evaluation evidence. All monitoring and evaluation depends on valid tools, the development of which is critical in newer programme areas without many proven methodologies. In recent years, UNICEF has increased investment in monitoring and evaluation and methods research across the child protection focus area.

84. Monitoring through household surveys like the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) must cope with the hidden and sensitive nature of violations. Despite this, excellent progress has been achieved. Six modules have been added to MICS since 2000: female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C); child disciplining; child labour; birth registration; early or child marriage; and attitudes towards domestic violence. Data from the highest-quality "gold standard" monitoring is the basis for a first set of publications with comparable cross-national data. Reports on child protection overall and child discipline have been published, with reports on FGM/C, child marriage and vulnerability scheduled for 2012-2013.

85. Monitoring improvements have not yet reached some vulnerable groups outside of households, including children living on the street and children in prison or institutional care. Studies on violence in schools, against the disabled, among migrants or resulting from gang activity are also underrepresented. The absence of reliable data on violence in institutions (schools, prisons, alternatives to home care) is especially troubling, as it is within the power of States and providers to collect it.

86. Significant investments have also supported new data collection tools and methodologies. Global indicators on juvenile justice, formal care, rule of law, and armed violence were developed with partners, including the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNDP, the World Health Organization, the United States Centers for Disease Control and academic institutions. An especially close relationship exists with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against

Children, with whom UNICEF collaborates extensively towards the common goal of enhanced data, research and knowledge management.

87. Developing holistic approaches is rarer and more difficult, but the Eastern and Southern Africa Region will in 2012-2013 implement a five-nation operational research effort to strengthen national child protection monitoring and evaluation systems.

Use of evaluations

88. At headquarters level, evaluations on programmes to prevent violence against children are utilized for large-scale lessons-learning exercises. Child protection is the only section to have organized two meta-evaluations, in 2008 and in 2011. UNICEF also supplied evaluations to a multi-agency systematic review, leading to a report, *What Are We Learning About Protecting Children in the Community? An Inter-agency Review of Evidence on Community-based Child Protection Mechanisms* (2010), and to inter-agency action research now underway in Kenya and Sierra Leone.

89. At the country level, there is general compliance with the management response requirement and the results are employed in diverse ways. Strong examples of national utilization are found in a wide range of countries, including Egypt, the Gambia, Senegal and Serbia.

90. In the West and Central Africa region, recent evaluations of child-trafficking programmes led to an adaptation of the regional guidelines to protect trafficking victims and a multi-agency initiative on "children on the move", covering migration and trafficking.

Recommendations

91. Despite being a relatively new and fast-growing sector, programming to address violence against children is investing heavily in evaluation, from indicators and tools to examining field-based results. A significant evidence base has emerged and practitioners are eager to use it. Attention is properly focused on relevance, strategy effectiveness, and results measurement. All these good practices should continue.

92. For the key gaps noted in this report, UNICEF is advised to prioritize four actions:

(a) *Strengthen planning and monitoring and evaluation capacity among monitoring and evaluation and child protection staff.* The child protection sector should consult with programme guidance, human resources, and monitoring and evaluation staff to determine what additional support, training or technical guidance can be generated for staff in child protection and monitoring and evaluation. Making the existing staff members more conscious and capable of executing their accountabilities to generate good evidence is the most critical action that can be taken.

(b) *Review the systems approach.* The core strategies of social change and systems strengthening components proposed in the 2008 Child Protection Strategy should be reviewed and further elaborated by using new knowledge and field-level evidence. Key issues are ensuring the inclusion of all aspects known to be important,

presenting guidance on adaptations to particular circumstances, and uniting systems and social change in a joint approach.

(c) *Conduct global-level evaluations*. There is a notable absence of global-level evaluations of programming on the prevention of violence against children. The breadth of programming is such that corporate evaluations should be undertaken. Similarly, violence issues should be addressed in major evaluations, where relevant.

(d) *Review child safeguarding policies*. UNICEF should review its child safeguarding policies to ensure their adequacy for the range of programme partners which it supports and the contexts in which it operates. It should also review how well the policies are implemented, including adequacy of training, incorporation within partnership agreements, and monitoring and review.

VIII. Draft decision

93. UNICEF recommends that the Executive Board approve the following draft decision:

The Executive Board

1. *Takes note* of the annual report on the evaluation function and major evaluations in UNICEF (E/ICEF/2012/13);

2. *Reaffirms* the central role played by the evaluation function in UNICEF and the importance of the principles set out in its Evaluation Policy (E/ICEF/2008/4);

3. *Welcomes* the evidence presented in the report of continued strengthening of the evaluation function at the decentralized level and encourages UNICEF to accelerate progress;

4. *Takes note* of the key performance indicators tracking the effectiveness of the evaluation system and the administrative data on human and financial resources;

5. *Notes* the positive work to strengthen the skills, capacities, and systems of national partners and to strengthen South-South learning;

6. *Welcomes* the thematic presentation of recent evaluation results in child protection and the prevention of violence against children, and the management response;

7. *Requests* UNICEF to:

(a) Report on steps taken to ensure relevant evaluation results are systematically considered and used in preparing key policies, strategies and programmes; and

(b) Report on the implementation of the management response to the thematic review of programming on the prevention of violence against children.